

PETITION

OF

P. A. HARGOUS,

OFFERING

*To the consideration of Congress the advantages of a railroad across the isthmus of Tehuantepec, and praying that Congress, before its final action on the subject, will allow time for establishing the facts therein stated.*

FEBRUARY 6, 1849.

Ordered to be printed.

*To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled :*

The petition of Peter A. Hargous, of the city of New York, for himself and in behalf of others interested with him, respectfully represents; that they are invested with full authority from the Mexican republic, under the most solemn guaranties from that government, to open a communication between the gulf of Mexico and the Pacific ocean, across the isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Your petitioner respectfully represents the following facts which he has derived from the authentic and published report of the engineer who made the surveys in relation to this route, in order that your honorable body may possess all the necessary information on this highly important subject.

The grant from the Mexican government, by which the privilege is secured to your petitioner of opening a communication across the isthmus, is of the most liberal character, and offers the strongest inducements for undertaking the enterprise. The privileges of the grant are secured to your petitioner and those associated with him for the period of fifty years; and during this time the government of Mexico has pledged itself "not to impose any contributions or taxes upon travellers or their effects in transitu, and not to levy any imposts or forced loans on the grantees." The grant also secures the right to "all foreigners to acquire real property, and to exercise any trade or calling, not even excepting that of mining, within the distance of fifty leagues on either side of the line of transit."

Finally, "in the name of the supreme government, and under the most solemn assurances, it is declared and promised that all and every one of the concessions mentioned, shall be honorably fulfilled now and at all

times, pledging the honor and public faith of the nation to maintain the projector, Don Jose Garay, as well as any private individual or company succeeding or representing him, either natives or foreigners, in the undisturbed enjoyment of all the concessions granted, holding the national administration responsible for any acts of its own or its agents, which from want of proper fulfilment of the covenant might injure the interests of the proprietor."

Under this grant topographical, geological, and hydrographical surveys of the line of a communication across the isthmus have been made. They were made under the direction of Mr. Moro, an Italian engineer of high distinction, assisted by two other scientific gentlemen. "The entire line of country was carefully surveyed and mapped; the face of the land, its productions and capabilities were examined with untiring perseverance," and a very full report was subsequently drawn up, which has been published, with accompanying maps; all of which are now in the possession of your petitioner.

"From these surveys it is established that the entire distance from sea to sea is 135 miles in a straight line, and presents a wide plain from the mouth of the Coatza Coalcos to the port of the Wesa de Tarifa, a table or elevated plain on the line of the Andez, which rises to the height of 650 feet above the level of the sea, and at the distance of 5 miles again descends to a plain which reaches the Pacific. The summit level to be overcome is only 650 feet; 30 miles of the river Coatza Coalcos are navigable for ships of the largest class, and 15 miles beyond this, for vessels of light draught, leaving only about 115 miles of railroad to be made. It would occupy too much space to enumerate all the details of these surveys, and which go to show so strongly how easily a railroad can be constructed across the isthmus of Tehuantepec. It is sufficient to say that the absolute practicability has been clearly ascertained."

In other respects it affords great facilities for construction. "The entire course of the Coatza Coalcos is bounded by forests, which can supply immense quantities of the proper kind of timber suitable for the construction of a railroad, and all of which is, by the terms of the grant, the property of the company undertaking the construction of the road. Limestone, strong clay, asphaltum, and building stone of the best quality suitable for bridges, where necessary, are placed, as if purposely by nature, all along the direction of this route. The Zapotecos and other Indians can be found in quite sufficient numbers to carry on the work, and at those points where foreign labor is indispensable, the temperature is such as to allow them to pursue their labor without either inconvenience or injury to their health. The climate, though warm, is healthy. The natives are mild, submissive, and tractable. There are ample sources whence to obtain a stock of domestic animals and beasts of burden. Throughout the whole line secured by the grant as well for the purposes of a communication across the isthmus as for the settlement of the country by foreigners, all the productions of the equatorial and temperate regions are found in the greatest abundance; for the valley of the isthmus produces the former, and on ascending the more elevated country bordering on the valley, the climate of the temperate zone is found there as well as its productions. At each end of the railroad are suitable places for fine harbors, as well as to depth, size, and security from storms. It is true there is a bar at the mouth of the Coatza Coalcos. By different

navigators the water has been sounded, and from twelve to eighteen feet have been found on it at low water. Commodore Perry in his survey in 1847, found twelve feet. At a small pass at the entrance of the ocean on the Pacific side there is at low water seven feet.

Your petitioner, however, is convinced, from the character of the obstructions, that they can, at a small expense of time and money, be easily removed, and will then open an entrance for vessels of large size into ports equal to any in the world. He is prepared to show this to the satisfaction of your honorable body.

Such are some of the physical advantages connected with this route. There are others, however, no less important. The distance from the mouth of the Mississippi to San Francisco, by the isthmus of Tehuantepec, is 3,294 miles, by the isthmus of Panama, 5,000; thus showing that the route by the isthmus of Tehuantepec is 1,706 miles shorter than by Panama. The distance from New York, by the isthmus of Tehuantepec, is 4,744 miles; by the isthmus of Panama, 5,858 miles—making the route by Tehuantepec from New York to San Francisco 1,104 miles shorter than by the isthmus of Panama.

The mere statement of these facts carries with it its own importance; for it is an axiom that in all human operations the saving of time is the saving of labor and money. This fact is already exercising its influence; for enterprising men are at this very moment turning their attention to this route without the advantages of an artificial communication across it.

In time of war, too, the route by the Carribean sea would bring us under the guns of hostile forts and fleets, without any port of our own to resort to either for shelter or repairs, whereas by the Tehuantepec route, we would be all the time within the limits of our own sea; for such, in truth, the gulf of Mexico may be considered in relation to us.

Your petitioner has already adverted to the fact, that under the grant from Mexico, 150 miles on each side of the route of the proposed road across the isthmus are open to the emigration of foreigners, who are entitled to the privileges of holding lands in fee. From the inducements of climate and production throughout this region, and more from its great water-power, which is abundant on all the table land, your petitioner is firmly convinced that in the course of a few years this whole country will be settled by people from the United States and Europe; and thus, while all these rights will be in our hands, the blessings of our civilization will silently but powerfully extend themselves.

Besides these civil and moral advantages, which of themselves are sufficient to show the important character of this route, there is a consideration of a political kind not less important than all of them. The policy of cultivating the most friendly relations, and of cementing the good understanding which now so happily exists between the United States and Mexico, must be strikingly obvious to every American statesman. Political friendships are best secured through the interests of nations, and especially where they can be made mutual and identical. The broadest foundation is laid for an extensive and lucrative commerce between the two countries, from the fact that we are neighbors, both by land and sea, with ports facing, and almost within sight of each other, and each possessing what the other wants. It is therefore clearly for our interests to take all the necessary steps to promote this desirable end.

Nothing could be more opportune than a communication across the isthmus of Tehuantepec, under the guidance and capital of the United States; for the advantages will incidentally be so great to Mexico that her interests, as well as a wise policy on her part, will induce that republic to cherish the most friendly relations with us; and hence, through the harmonizing influence of reciprocal commercial interests, we will secure a firm ally in our neighbor. All other routes carry us into the land of strangers, far from our own shores, with interests dissimilar if not adverse to ours, and where, from the nature of the climate and the character of the people, no affiliation of either political or commercial relations can ever be advantageously established.

At the present moment everything conspires to aid the undertaking, and to insure for it a successful result, and nothing more so than the fact that the inhabitants of the isthmus have testified the greatest interest in the project, have given to it all the forms required of them their hearty approbation, and are ready to afford all the facilities for the construction of a road.

In addition, your petitioner will forthwith take the necessary steps to obtain all proper guaranties from the government of Mexico for the security of the rights of the company which he proposes to form; in which he has entire confidence that he will succeed, as he knows that the Mexican people are not only favorably disposed to the projected road, and have a full perception of its importance to their country, but are anxious for its completion. If such guaranties are obtained, he will immediately organize an American company for the construction of the road, and he has not the slightest doubt that the requisite amount of stock will be subscribed, and the road forthwith commenced. In the meantime he does not desire to precipitate the government of the United States into any contract untill full assurance is given of the completion of the road; but he only asks that the government will not hastily commit itself without a full knowledge of all the advantages of the road which he proposes to construct in comparison with any and all others.

As to the practicability of the route, it may be well to give the very words of the distinguished engineer who surveyed it, and all of which has the confident conviction of your petitioner as to its truth. He says: "The careful survey of the line of transit over the isthmus demonstrates the practicability of the project, since it presents no one serious difficulty which may not be readily conquered by means of capital and science, the gigantic developments of which at this auspicious period seem to have placed at the disposal of the engineer inexhaustible and unlimited power."

Your petitioner has brought these principal facts to the notice of your honorable body in the hope further steps may be adopted which will ensure a full examination of the results of the survey, in the firm conviction on his part that such an examination will establish the value of this route to the United States in a communication with its possessions on the Pacific shore.

P. A. HARGOUS.